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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000022

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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: KONDOVO GANG LEADER CONVICTED, REMAINS
AT LARGE

REF: 05 SKOPJE 1059

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4(b) & (d).

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) Gang leader Agim Krasniqi and two of his associates have been sentenced to prison terms for their involvement in the attempted kidnapping and wounding of a rival ethnic Albanian gang member in October 2003. Krasniqi and one associate were tried, convicted and sentenced in absentia and remain free. Krasniqi also faces separate terrorism charges stemming from a 2004-2005 armed standoff with Macedonian authorities in the Skopje suburb of Kondovo. The kidnapping sentence would signal a step forward for rule of law in Macedonia if/if chances were good that Krasniqi would ever serve time in jail. Unfortunately, he is unlikely to do so; he is even less likely to face justice for the terrorism charges. End Summary.

18-MONTH SENTENCE FOR KIDNAPPING CHARGES

12. (U) On January 3, ethnic Albanian gang leader Agim Krasniqi was sentenced to eighteen months in prison for the attempted kidnapping and wounding of Shevaj Muaremi in October 2003. Krasniqi's associate, Sehat Ramadani, also was sentenced to eighteen months. A third associate, Sali Qemal, received a six month suspended sentence for being an accomplice to the attempted kidnapping. Skopje Basic Court I convicted both Krasniqi and Ramadani in absentia, as both men had failed on numerous occasions to appear for court for hearings in the case. Qemal was present at the court proceedings.

TERRORISM CHARGES GO UNANSWERED, KRASNIQI AT LARGE

13. (U) Krasniqi, along with a number of other individuals, faces separate terrorism charges stemming from a standoff in the Skopje suburb of Kondovo in 2004 and 2005 (reftel). Krasniqi and his armed gang threatened to shell Skopje, and Kondovo was "off limits" to police during the standoff. The court proceedings on these charges have been suspended indefinitely, pending the defendants' appearances in court. Both Krasniqi and Ramadani remain free following the recent convictions, and continue to carry out their daily activities as normal. The Ministry of Interior has been widely

criticized for failing to arrest Krasniqi. Interior Minister Gordana Jankulovska recently was quoted as saying Krasniqi will be arrested as soon as the "correct conditions" are met.

RULE OF LAW (BREAKING) DEAL

¶4. (C) Menduh Thaci, Vice President of ethnic Albanian junior governing coalition partner DPA, complained to DCM in a January 9 meeting that the Krasniqi sentencing had come at an inopportune time. He pointed out that the sentencing decision was announced just as DPA representatives were contending with rival eAlbanian DUI party candidates for the January 14 municipal by-elections in the nearby Saraj municipality, which includes the village of Kondovo. (NOTE: Krasniqi is a DPA member and has used strong-arm tactics in campaigning for the party's candidates in local and parliamentary elections in the past. He was expected to similarly "assist" DPA in the Saraj by-elections. END NOTE.)

¶5. (C) Thaci claimed the sentencing broke an agreement that had been reached within the government to let Krasniqi's brother "do the time" for the kidnapping crime, while the charges in the terrorism case were to have been reduced to "endangering the public." Krasniqi would then receive a suspended two or three-year sentence for that crime and would agree to keep a low public and media profile. Afterward, DPA would try to persuade Krasniqi to leave Macedonia for Germany, where his wife resides.

COMMENT

¶6. (SBU) The Krasniqi kidnapping verdict and sentence would reflect a step forward for rule of law in Macedonia if there

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was a better-than-even chance that he and his accomplices would actually serve time in jail. As it stands, that is unlikely to happen. We believe Krasniqi is even less likely to face justice for the terrorism charges, given his propensity for avoiding court appearances. Thaci's cavalier attitude toward the case, including his feigned state of high dudgeon over the GOM's failure to honor the alleged "deal" to get Krasniqi off the hook, highlights a worrisome lack of seriousness on DPA's part regarding the importance of upholding the rule of law in Macedonia. For its part, the ethnic-Macedonian coalition leaders are reluctant to confront Krasniqi through an actual arrest for fear of endangering their relationship with DPA. Looking the other way is easiest for them in the short-run; a long-term perspective is all too rare in Macedonian politics.

MILOVANOVIC